

Postponing the Tokyo Olympics is a big disappointment



Japan's Kohei Uchimura is one of the greatest gymnasts ever. He and other Japanese athletes were looking forward to welcoming the world to the Tokyo Olympics this year, but they will have to wait until 2021.

[Photo: Agencia Brasil Fotografias]

The postponement of the Olympic Games leaves athletes and organisers with a lot of work to do, writes OMAR CHAUDHURI.

The Tokyo Olympic Games is the most high-profile event that has been **postponed** because of the coronavirus **pandemic**. Even though the Games were still four months away, the host country and organisers decided in March that it was unlikely that they could run the event safely. They have agreed that the Games will begin on 23 July 2021, with the Paralympics starting a month later.

Moving the Olympics from one year to another is not like moving any other event. If you were organising a party, and needed to postpone it until next year, you might email all the guests telling them the new date. One or two people might not be able to attend, but it would not be a complicated task.

The Olympics, however, has over 11,000 guests — and that's just the athletes. There are also the coaches, fans, sponsors, and volunteers. They were due to compete in and attend events at 33 venues in Tokyo and around Japan. Organisers had been planning the event for seven years, and never expected the start date to move.

They now have just fifteen months to make sure everything and everyone is ready.



Host cities of the Summer Olympics through the years.

Athletes in a fix

The people most obviously affected by the postponement are the athletes. In early March, many were getting frustrated that they didn't know if the Games were taking place or not. Nearly half of the athlete places in the Games had not even been filled yet, but athletes were not sure when qualification races would take place. Therefore, they did not know how and when to prepare.

Moving the Olympics to 2021 does not completely fix this problem. Do athletes who were already qualified have to qualify again? It is hard to say what would be fair. What's more, athletes prepare themselves so that they "peak" during an Olympics. It is not possible for an athlete to perform at their best consistently for four years. Pushing oneself to the limit in every training session or race might lead to injury or getting mentally "burnt out".

"You give your heart and soul to something for four years, then for it not to go ahead is just horrible," said double taekwondo gold medallist Jade Jones after news of the postponement. "I'm a very positive person but the idea, right now, of having to devote myself to another year's **slog** is a very difficult one."

Athletes in some sports might find it tougher than others. Analysis by the FiveThirtyEight website showed that around 80 per cent of gymnasts only ever compete in one Olympics, compared to nearly 50 per cent of table tennis players who compete in two or more. Gymnasts only have a small **window** where they can compete at their best, so even a year's postponement can mean they reduce their chance of winning a gold medal.

Additional costs

It is not just the athletes who will have to adjust. It had been reported that the original cost of organising the Games is over US\$12 billion. The Japanese government will now have to spend even more money over the next year. They will have to pay staff and hire venues, without getting any extra money from ticket sales or from television companies.

It was also expected that people from all over the world would come and spend money in Japan during the Olympics. This would help Japanese people and businesses. Sports fans might not travel to Japan now because they may already have other plans for 2021, or they may want to stay at home while there are still concerns about coronavirus. Hotels that would have been full this summer might not get the same number of guests next year, for example.

You might think that the Olympics would change its name from “Tokyo 2020” to “Tokyo 2021”. However, this will not be the case. There are lots of things that have already been made that have the name “Tokyo 2020” on it, including posters, products you can buy, and medals. In fact, the medals have been made from recycled electronics, including over 6 million mobile phones. It would be a huge waste to throw them away.

Right decision

While Japan is busy organising the postponement of the Olympics, there are other sports and countries that will need to make their own adjustments too. Some sports — in particular, swimming and athletics — have major championships in 2021. They will need to move or cancel these events. They will face some of the same challenges that Japan is facing by needing to wait a year. The timing of sports events is decided many years in advance, giving people time to prepare. Now they have less than 12 months to make sure athletes can perform and fans attend.

Despite these challenges, everyone agrees that postponing the Olympic Games was the right decision. With fans gathering in stadiums, and athletes living closely in the Olympic Village, it would have been impossible to **guarantee** everyone’s safety. Let’s hope the Games can take place in 2021 and provide us and athletes with some positive memories of “Tokyo 2020”.

VOCAB BUILDER

postponed (say “post-poēn’d”; verb) = moved to a later time.

pandemic (say “pan-de-mik”; noun) = the spread of a new disease around the world.

slog (say “slog”; noun) = tiring and difficult work.

window (say “win-do”; noun) = an opening. Here, it refers to a short time for a rare chance to do something.

guarantee (say “ga-ren-tee”; verb) = promise with certainty.

Activity

Look for windows

In this story, the writer says that gymnasts have only a small window of opportunity to excel. Some of them are devastated by the postponement of Tokyo 2020. You too may be very disappointed



about events in your life being cancelled or postponed because of COVID-19. Pick one example. Then, look ahead. Will there be another opportunity later for you to take part in it?

This event is cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19:

My next window of opportunity to take part in such an event:

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When one window in your life closes, don't lose hope. Look for another one!